CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1.   A method for providing data communications network access to a user,

5   comprising:

providing the user with an audiovisual display monitor;

providing the other with at least one input device;

allocating an assignable computing device (ACD) to the user in response to

the user's request for data communications network access;

10   creating a connection between the ACD on the data communications

network;

preparing an audiovisual display based on signals received from the data

communications network with the ACD;

displaying the audiovisual display on the audiovisual display monitor;

15   receiving signals from the at least one input device at the ACD;

converting said received signals to signals compatible with the data

communications network; and

sending said compatible signals to the data communications network.

2.   A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein displaying includes:

20   converting said audiovisual display to a video signal;

modulating said video signal onto an RF carrier having a specific channel

assignment;

transmitting said RF carrier to the audiovisual display monitor; and

tuning the audiovisual display monitor to said specific channel so is to demodulate the RF carrier, receive the video signal and display the audiovisual display.

5 3. A method for presenting program material from a plurality of program

sources to users using a host computing device and allocating tasks among a

plurality of audiovisual serving devices, said method comprising:

responding to a user request to order program material by selecting one of a

plurality of Assignable Computing Devices (ACDs) to generate a menu, said menu

10 listing available program material;

presenting the user with said menu over a Room Communication

Subsystem (RCS);

receiving a program selection from the user over a Room Communication

Subsystem (RCS);

15 responding to said selection of program material by selecting one of a

plurality of audiovisual serving devices to present the program material; and

presenting the program material to the user over the RCS.

4. A method in accordance with claim 3 wherein said ACD is assigned to

respond to the user request by the host computing device in communication with

20 the user.

5. A method in accordance with claim 3 wherein said audiovisual serving

device is assigned to respond to the user selection by the host computing.

6. A method in accordance with claim 3 wherein said audiovisual serving device is assigned to respond to the user request by the ACD in communication with the user.

7. A method in accordance with claim 3 further comprising creating a list of

5   available ACDs before selecting said ACD to generate said menu.

8. A method in accordance with claim 3 further comprising creating a list of available audiovisual serving devices before selecting said audiovisual serving device to present the program material.

9. A method in accordance with claim 3 wherein said menu is updated in

10   response to selecting said ACD to generate said menu.

10. A method in accordance with claim 3 wherein said menu is updated in response to receiving said program selection from the user.

11. A method in accordance with claim 3 further comprising creating a set of user data, said set of user data listing stated user preferences.

15   12. A method in accordance with claim 11 wherein said menu is modified to reflect said set of user data.

13. A method in accordance with claim 3 further comprising presenting the user with a broadcast channel.

14. A method in accordance with claim 13 further comprising creating a set of

20   user data, said set of user data listing stated user preferences.

15. A method in accordance with claim 14 wherein said broadcast channel is modified to reflect said set of user preferences.

16.   A method in accordance with claim 3 wherein adding an additional audiovisual serving device causes a socket connection to be made to the host.

17.   A method in accordance with claim 3 wherein adding an additional audiovisual serving device causes an exchange of signals between the host and

5   said additional audiovisual serving device.

18.   A method in accordance with claim 3 further comprising polling the audiovisual serving device for status after a first defined interval of time.

19.   A method in accordance with claim 18 wherein the audiovisual serving device is restarted in response to instructions from the host after a second defined

10   interval of time.

20.   An apparatus for presenting program material from a plurality of program sources to users using a host computing device and a plurality of audiovisual serving devices, comprising:

a programming subsystem;

15   a Room Communication Subsystem (RCS);

a Site Management Subsystem (SMS);

said RCS connecting a plurality of user terminals to the system;

said programming subsystem including a plurality of audiovisual serving devices communicating with the user terminals over said RCS; and

20   said SMS assigning an Assignable Computing Device (ACD) audiovisual serving device to communicate with a user terminal in response to an initial communication from a user terminal.

21. An apparatus in accordance with claim 20 wherein said SMS is adapted to keep track of the availability of said audiovisual serving devices when assigning allocating tasks.

22. An apparatus in accordance with claim 20 wherein said SMS is adapted to

5 keep track of the availability of said ACD devices when assigning allocating tasks.

23. An apparatus in accordance with claim 20 wherein said programming subsystem communicates an update of the availability of the audiovisual serving devices to said SMS.

24. An apparatus in accordance with claim 20 wherein said SMS polls said

10 programming subsystem for an update of the availability of audiovisual serving devices.

25. An apparatus in accordance with claim 20 also comprising a menu responsive to a list of currently available program material.

26. An apparatus in accordance with claim 25 further comprising a set of user

15 data, said user data listing stated user preferences.

27. An apparatus in accordance with claim 26 wherein said menu is responsive to said set of user data.

28. An apparatus in accordance with claim 20 further comprising a broadcast channel.

20 29. An apparatus in accordance with claim 28 further comprising a set of user data, said user data listing stated user preferences.

30. An apparatus in accordance with claim 29 wherein said broadcast channel is responsive to said set of user data.

31. An apparatus in accordance with claim 20 wherein said programming subsystem includes an Interactive Programming System (IPS) for presenting

5   interactive program material.

32. An apparatus in accordance with claim 31 wherein said interactive program material includes video game applications.

33. An apparatus in accordance with claim 31 wherein said interactive program material includes computer applications.

10   34. An apparatus in accordance with claim 31 wherein said interactive program material includes access to the Internet.

35. An apparatus in accordance with claim 31 wherein said interactive program material includes access to the Internet with graphic displays modified for viewing on a TV monitor.

32